Sedatives or Solutions
Project Commitment II
November 17, 1971

Mr. Gipson, Mr. Lewis, Mr. Baxter, and fellow "do-gooders" of Tippecanoe County: Project Commitment II is at an end, and-all things considered it has been a remarkable experience. It has demonstrated that within the fabric of our society there is a substantial number of people from all stations in life who care about their fellow man, and who are willing to devote six evenings to the discussion of, first-prejudice and racism - and now justice. But this evening, as we conclude our deliberations, one question remains to be asked, one devastatingly ultimate kind of question; namely, "So What?"

It was asked last night on the editorial page of the Journal-Courier: gently, to be sure - but nevertheless - "now what?" where do we go from here?" I think there is validity in talk: especially the kind of talk that occurs around the tables at Project Commitment. Hopefully it makes us sensitive to how the world looks to people who are different from us, racially, socially, economically. That's good. And yet if our talk has been an end it itself, our time has been poorly spent. In fact, talk can sometimes be a sedative-talking about a problem can be one of the ways I avoid seeking a solution. So - this evening we come to a turning point: a time for the talking to stop and the work to begin. And upon the results of this evening hangs the entire validity of the entire project.

Our theme is, appropriately "Justice in Action". Ahat does it mean? You have spent five sessions talking about justice within the perimeters of five different social institutions. And I would guess that you are every bit as hard pressed to define justice now as you were at the beginning. Justice is one of those words that does not lend itself to easy definition. What is justice in acrion? That depends very much on who you're asking. Obviously, to the administrators of Attica prison, and to the inmates of that institution, Justice means two different things. What is Justice for the criminal? Is it punishment? Is it rehabilatation? What is justice for the poor, the young, the black, the American Indian? It depends on who you ask. In the classic Billy Budd, Herman Melville sets out the problem with relative definitions of justice. Young Billy, a tongue-tied boy aboard ship, was unfairly accused of helping to plot a mutiny. Finally after endless provocation Billy struck his accuser and the blow accidently killed him. Everybody knew that the death was accidental - and the ship's officers were ready to acquit Billy of any crime. But then, the captain, a stern disciplinarian, convinced them that their duty was stringently to apply the articles of war particularly that pro= vision regarding the striking of a superior officer. So they hanged Billy. The law was obeyed. Justice was served. Or was it?

That's the whole problem with justice. It all depends on who'se administering it, and behind that, who defined it in the first place. And you and I have a whole lot of trouble nailing it down. The multi-media presentation which began our series of meetings was eloquent at this point. If my memory serves me correctly, there were very few people who seemed to know what justice is. And more significantly there were very few people who thought that the Court House was the symbol of justice in our community.

Well, perhaps it can't be defined. Perhaps the best we can do with the word justice is what the late Hugo Black did with the word pornography. He said he couldn't define it, but he knew it when he saw it. Perhaps justice goes so deeply to the heart of what it means to be human that we can't ever confine it to verbal definition. Perhaps all we have is the visceral feeling that it isn't happening in certain situations.

And yet, we're not just playing intellectual games here. Justice is defined for us - not academically or theoretically - but personally, by a great

debate I hear raging is blissfully ignorant of the facts and instead depends on platitudes and stereotypes. Welfare recipients are not lazy. Welfare recipients are not getting rich at the expense of the tax payer. There is a valid debate about the effectiveness of the system to do what it was intended. But that debate rarely takes place. Knowledge is the answer here-cold hard facts-who'se on welfare and how much they're getting. And to participate in the debate demands that we, at least know what we're talking about. If it's Justice we're after - and if love has anything to do with Justice, we must begin to see people as people-not categories, statistics or social problems. We've screamed at each other long enough in worn out stereotypes. Policemen are not pigs: ADC mothers are not lazy: Colonels are not fascists: Blacks are not dirty: students are not revolutionaries: But, they are all people.

Second, to get involved in my neighbor's justice demands toughness, tenacity, courage. Our numbers are not great compared to the population of our community. And to expect that a social revolution will occur because we're here tonight is naive. To get involved means to be ready to accept defeat time and time again. It means to live in the valley of discouragement when it seems as if no one really cares. It means, and this is perhaps hardest of all, to live with the cynicism of others. I addressed you initially as "do - gooders" and I meant that. People like you and me are known sometimes as "bleeding-hearts" as "do-gooders" and the intent of that description is that somehow we aren't with it, that we're trouble makers, that we're naive and not tuned into the real decision making criteria of our culture. That hurts - the scorn and derision of important people hurts down deep where we live. So be it. Let's muster the courage to withstand that scorn, and instead of flinching at the epitaph "do-gooder" - let's wear it with pride.

Third - altruism. To be involved in my neighbor's justice means that on a deep personal level, religious - if you will, I must come to see that neighbor as a person of worth and dignity. We are in the midst of a revolution in our culture - and one thing that seems to be emerging is a rediscovery of the beauty and value of the individual human life.

"Everything is beautiful, in it's own way" the popular song puts it. And before that Albert Camus said it poetically: "There is in this world beauty, and there are the humiliated; and we must strive, hard as it is, not to be unfaithful neither to the one nor to the other" We need a vision-a lofty ideal-and I would suggest that there is none loftier than the intrinsic worth of every human being.

Our neighbors are in need. People all around us are hurting and bleeding in ways that we have been discussing for several weeks. And now we must make answer to the simple but profound question, "So What?"

We can go from this place this evening on one of two roads. One of them is called sedatives: the other solutions. The word sedative is a medical term for a drug that relieves pain or irritation. The root word is sedate; and one of Webster's definitions of sedate is "uninfluenced by that which desturbs" Project Commitment has been designed to disturb and hopefully it has succeeded. To remedy our disturbance we can seek a sedative: we can return to the never-never land of television every evening and business as usual every day. We can be sedated by the illusion that our problems will solve themselves if we ignore them long enough. We can return to the apathy that has come to characterize middle class America. William Sloane Coffin, talking to the graduating class at Harvard put it this way: "I think passivity is the chief neurosis of America. By this I mean the way we tend to allow society to make our significient choices for us, and reserve for ourselves only the inconsequential ones. The result is that the average American is now a Hamlet in a supermarket: to buy or not to buy, that is the question".

One road is called sedatives - and it leads away from the all the problems-all the hurting people - all the complex issues - it is the way of ease and comfort and respectability. It is also, I would suggest, the way you and I may